

# Losing Our Religion

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Date: 14 April 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] There's so much that we discover in the narrative of Judges 17 and 18. It's in this particular story, this record, that we read of the migration of the tribe of Dan from its initial allotment of land, kind of in the central portion of Canaan, to the northernmost tip of Canaan.

So if you've ever wondered, if you're reading through your Old Testament and you hear sometimes there is a phrase used by the prophets or the people in the historical books, they'll talk about Israel from Dan to Beersheba, right?

And what they mean by that, they're using that phrase to say all of Israel, all of God's people. And the reason that's the phrase that they use is because Dan was at the very northern tip of the land of Canaan and Beersheba was at the very southern tip of Canaan.

But if you go to Genesis and Joshua and you begin to sort through the allotments of land, you'll find that Dan wasn't supposed to be in the north. So how did they get there? Well, this story tells us how they got there and how they ended up in that particular place.

We learn that here. We also have this unique opportunity to peek into the life of the grandson of one of Israel's most famous and essential leaders.

[ 1 : 21 ] It becomes a lesson to us as we'll see that even the most faithful believers cannot guarantee the faithfulness of their own children and grandchildren.

But those things aren't the primary point here. The author's primary point in this section is to show the nature of Israel's spiritual decline during the time of the judges.

In chapter 17, we see this on an individual level through this man named Micah. In chapter 18, we see it on a corporate level through the tribe of Dan.

But influencing and enabling the apostasy in this text is a crooked spiritual leader. A spiritual leader who has abandoned faithfulness to his call in order that he might instead gain riches and power and prestige.

And all three of these dynamics are immediately relevant to the church as a whole. Which often seems to be in the same kind of spiritual decline as Israel was in the book of Judges.

[ 2 : 43 ] Now, my comparison of Israel in Judges to the modern church may seem like a bit of an overreaction. But we need to understand that spiritual apostasy does not always look like total rejection of God.

In fact, often in our culture, it doesn't look like total rejection of God, at least on the surface. Often it appears like true worship. Only upon closer examination, we find some type of personal twist or shift in church culture that changes it just enough so that the gospel is lost, that the glory of God is diminished.

It's not always easy to see. Such was the case in these two chapters. All of the people in this narrative in chapter 17 and in 18 considered themselves to be genuine worshipers of Yahweh, genuine worshipers of the God of Israel, the one true and living God.

That's what they thought they were. But their religion was a personal fabrication that ignored the revealed word of God.

Does that not sound like the condition of many churches today? They're using the right language. We're saying the right things and even often doing the right things.

[ 4 : 11 ] But when you get in and you start to really examine what's happening there, you find out that what they've done actually is they've taken the name of Christ or the name of God and they've ignored his revealed word in order to do what they want instead.

Here's what Dale Ralph Davis says about this in his commentary. He says in this passage, what is primarily condemned is not idolatry in the raw, but syncretism in particular.

Syncretism being the merging of two religions together, the merging of two religious ideas together. He says it's not the worship of other gods, but the worship of Yahweh in the wrong way.

That's where Israel's at right here. And of course, they've got other gods too. But the primary thing coming to the surface here is that they're just, they're trying to worship God in a way that God has not said he is to be worshiped.

Now, what we have here is an example of Israel losing its religion, so to speak. But there's three ways you can lose your religion.

[ 5 : 23 ] In one sense, you can really just forfeit it. That is, to abandon it for something different. And that's exactly what we see Micah and a rogue Levite and the tribe of Dan doing in this story.

They forfeit the true worship of God. They forfeit the authoritative word of God for something different, something else that they wanted instead.

Another way to, quote, lose your religion is for it to just fail you. To come to a point where you realize that it's a lie that cannot actually save you.

And we find that in chapter 17 and 18. The third way you could, quote, lose your religion is ultimately just to be condemned by it through the divine wrath of God.

That's what we find happening with the tribe of Dan. And we're gonna cover all three of those things as we work through the text today. But what I wanna do this morning is I wanna walk through the narrative to show you and to point out the nature and the cost of spiritual decline.

[ 6 : 40 ] What contributes to it? What are the things, the warning signs that we should be looking for that actually contribute to spiritual decline and ultimately spiritual apostasy? We want to see that in this text.

What are the costs of it? Why is it such a big deal? What happens at the end if that's the path that I pursue? We're gonna look at that too. But then in the end, what we want to do is we wanna ask ourselves, is there a solution to the problem?

Is there a solution to the problem for Israel in the passage? Is there a solution to the problem for our waywardness in our own lives and in our church perhaps? And I think all of those things can be answered.

Here's the first thing that I want you to notice. This is the bulk of the passage. I want you to see the nature of losing our religion. The nature. What does it look like? What contributes to it?

And I think there's two components of this in the text. The first is this. Unbridled individualism. Unrestrained individualism.

[ 7 : 42 ] Our first introduction, we read the first six verses a moment ago. Our first introduction to Micah the Ephraimite was not as a worshiper. Our first introduction to him is as a thief.

He stole 1,100 pieces of silver from his own mom. An enormous amount of money, to be honest. He steals it from her, but then he returns it.

Not because he feels the guilt of what he's done, but because he overheard his mom declaring a curse on whoever it is that took her money.

And he was afraid of the curse. Another sign of his syncretism, really, already. He's scared to death that just the proclamation of a curse from his mother was going to damn him.

And so he brings the money back to her. And of course, the mother's curse quickly turns from a pronouncement of curse to a pronouncement of blessing on her son.

[ 8 : 41 ] Isn't that interesting? It's not exactly what we expect. If you've never read the story before, maybe that was somewhat of a surprise to you. Here he says, hey, the 1,100 pieces of silver that someone stole from you, and you were so mad that you wanted whichever God you were praying to that day to kill them.

It was me, mom. Sorry. We would at least expect a spanking, right? Something. Something for this son who has stolen all this money. What does she do?

She doesn't do that. She says, blessed be my son by Yahweh. Now, how many of you parents have ever done that with your kids before? They did something stupid, or they did something wrong against you, and your first thought when they came and admitted it was to say, God bless you.

That's not typically the way we react. Well, that's exactly how she reacts. And it's not so unusual. It's not that strange for the mother to be so forgiving.

Parents that are here, you understand that. You understand what it's like to forgive your children, even that great sin against you. But what is so bizarre is the steps that she took to honor Micah's contrition.

[ 9 : 51 ] Notice what she does. She opted to, quote, dedicate the silver that he stole to the Lord, not by taking it to Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, and giving it to the priest there in order that it may be used for the purposes of the Lord, but she gave it to the silversmith, who then took it and melted it down and fashioned it into an idol.

This epitomizes, this action, it epitomizes the spiritual decline of the nation of Israel at the time. They had been so canonized at that point that they not only thought idolatry was excusable, but they were deceived and deluded into thinking that God would actually be pleased by it. That's what she's doing here. Her actions, they were meant to persuade God to enact this blessing on Micah as if the Lord was actually glad that she did it.

Look at her language in the passage itself. Look at verse three. His mother said, I dedicate the silver to the Lord from my hand for who?

For my son. In other words, by doing this, by fashioning this idol, God will forgive my son, and God will bless my son. It's deluded. Even still, she had such a low view of God that she didn't even use the entire dedicated amount of silver to have the idol made.

[ 11 : 25 ] Only a small portion of it. She dedicated 1,100 pieces, but she only gave 200 pieces to the silversmith. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. At least it's a low view of God, no matter how you look at it.

An errant view of God, for certain. But then we discover that this metal image was just one of many idols that Micah had collected in his house.

He was in the process of developing his own cult religion in the name of Yahweh. Look at the verse. It was in the house of Micah, verse 5, and the man Micah, he had a shrine, and he made an ephod, and he had other household gods as a part of this shrine, and then he went even so far as to anoint one of his sons to become a priest in the name of this new religion.

How could something like this happen in Israel? God was so clear to them. He had made his will so evident.

He had proved himself so miraculously on so many levels. How is it possible that someone in Israel that at least is aware of the true God would worship him in such a perverse way?

[ 12 : 46 ] The author gives us the answer in verse 6. In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

How could this happen? The answer is unbridled individualism. Unbridled individualism. This is what happens when people want God on their terms rather than on his terms.

So in order to establish his own brand of Israelite religion, Micah completely abandons the scriptures. Just in these first six verses, he has violated at least six of the Ten Commandments. He's ignored God's commands for proper worship, which was supposed to happen in Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, where God had put his own name and told them this is where to worship and this is how to worship.

He's completely ignored that. And he has taken upon himself a religious and spiritual authority that did not belong to him. Rather than doing what was right in God's eyes, Micah did his own thing and expected God to just be okay with it.

[ 14 : 07 ] Because it was in the name of God, in the name of Yahweh, God surely will accept it and be fine with it. It's not that bad. It's still the same God, right? You see, that's the thing.

It's not. It's not. Unless we worship God in the way that he has revealed himself and in the way that he has demanded us to, we worship a God of our own making.

The language may be the same, the titles may be the same, the name for God may be the same, but it's an idol. It's an idol of our imagination. And that's what Micah's doing here.

Since 1954, Burger King has tried to set itself up against the big dogs of the fast food industry, McDonald's, by emphasizing a particular slogan, right?

Do you know what it is? Have it your way. How many of you are singing the jingle in your head now? Hold the pickle, hold the lettuce.

[ 15 : 11 ] Special orders don't upset us. At BK, have it your way. Do you remember what's next? You rule.

At one time, this is what they had printed on their cups. Quote, you have the right to have what you want exactly the way you want it.

Because on the menu of life, you are today special. And tomorrow's. And the day after that. And, well, you get the drift. Yes, that's right.

We may be the king, but you, my friend, are the almighty ruler. Now, that may be okay for a burger joint.

I like to go to the drive-thru and order it the way that I want it. That's not good when it comes to your worship. But there's a lot of professing Christians that are treating God exactly like Burger King.

[16:18] He may be the king. He's the one with the power to actually accomplish things that I want in my life, but I'm the ruler. I'm the one who decides what I'm going to do with my life.

I'm the one who decides when and how and where I worship. I'm the one who decides the way I'm going to do things because he's the king but I'm the ruler. Many professing Christians, they don't want a Christianity over which Christ rules.

but one over which they rule and God just goes along with it. Here's the problem. Unbridled individualism, it lies about God.

It's a lie. It lies about God and it reduces worship to a matter of preference and convenience. Can we just think about that for just a moment?

This type of contribution to spiritual apostasy, it lies about God. It says something of him that is not true.

[17:34] It treats the worship of God as merely a matter of preference. This is what I want in a church. This is what I want in a worship service. This is what I want in a small group.

This is what I want. It's all a matter of preference and or convenience. Well, we won't concern ourselves too much with what the scripture says about when we are to gather and what's to be included in that gathering.

We're going to do it based on what's most convenient to our busy schedules. It's a lie. It creates a form of Christianity without the Bible.

Worship without doctrine. Salvation without repentance. A church body without a covenant amongst its people.

Love without discipline. And prosperity without persecution. In other words, it's a lie.

[18:46] Instead of looking to the scriptures to know God, people build their thoughts of God based on how they feel he should be and based on the ways that they think he should act.

And then they want to argue against the scriptures because they could, they would say there's no way God would do something like that. That can't be who God is because in my mind, God is very different than that.

It's all based on their feeling. It's based on what they want God to be rather than what God has revealed himself to be. And what is that? Idolatry. Unbridled individualism, it reveals itself in statements like, I don't have to go to church to be a Christian.

or I sense God more in nature than under the sound of preaching of the word. Or God only cares about the sincerity of my heart.

It's unbridled individualism. It trades God's truth for man's lies and it produces a counterfeit religion that knows nothing of the Christ that it claims to know and serve.

[20:01] That's what it does. Verse 7. Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah of the family of Judah who was a Levite and he sojourned there.

And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place. And as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. And Micah said to him, where do you come from?

And he said to him, I'm a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place. And Micah said to him, stay with me and be to me a father and a priest and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living.

And the Levite went in. And the Levite was content to dwell with the man. And the young man became to him like one of his sons. And Micah ordained the Levite and the young man became his priest and was in the house of Micah.

Then Micah said, now I know that the Lord will prosper me because I have a Levite as a priest. Now there are several problems with this sojourning Levite.

[21:15] But the most glaring of the problems is seen in his response to Micah's idolatry. What he should have done was declare that Micah's idolatry was sinful.

That's what he should have done. He should have called him to repent. He should have told him you got to destroy these idols and turn back to the true worship of God.

That was his job. That was his call. That was his responsibility this Levite. He should have read the scriptures to Micah. He should have corrected his errant view of God.

But instead he accepted Micah's handsome offer and became a willing participant in Micah's counterfeit religion. The pastor said, okay we'll go with it your way.

You just keep the silver coming and the new clothes coming. You keep providing the living that I need and I'll do whatever you want Micah. Writing to Timothy in the New Testament Paul said that churches will sometimes do exactly as Micah did.

[ 22 : 29 ] Micah wasn't looking for a priest who would teach him the truth of God. He wanted someone who would go along with his personal version of worship. He didn't want somebody to preach the Bible.

He wanted somebody who would do nothing but pronounce blessing on him. who would encourage him and enable his idolatry. Here's what Paul says for the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and they will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. What are the myths? Is that not what Micah is now subscribed to? A myth a lie it's not real but they'll wander off there why?

Because they'll find some pastors who will let them contributing to the unbridled individualism that is so rampant among professing Christians is this wave of pastors that compromise the truth of God make a mockery of true worship in order that they might build a crowd or gain some type of power in their religious affiliations or of course to pad their bank accounts.

A hundred years ago B.B. Warfield wrote this it is not a matter of small importance for the servant of Christ to begin to seek to please men in the gospel.

[ 24 : 07 ] Doing so he ceases to be Christ's servant performing Christ's will and he becomes the slave of men and in so doing he's no longer the teacher of the truth to men but the learner of falsehood from men.

Spiritual apostasy is the inevitable result of individuals who want to have it your way type of Christianity being led by men and women who are more than happy to go along with it.

Loved ones a version of Christianity that bends to your preference will not save you.

It cannot save you. It cannot help you. It will not bring you closer to God no matter how it makes you feel. It will condemn you.

It will condemn you to hell. To think of God simply in your own terms is to fashion another idol made in your own imagination.

[ 25 : 23 ] salvation. What we need is the Bible. We need the Bible at the center of everything. God's word is inerrant infallible authoritative word that's what we need.

It has to be at the center of our worship. It needs to be at the center of our devotion. It needs to be at the center of our counsel. It needs to be at the center of everything that we do. what we must do is submit to him as he has revealed himself in his own word.

What a privilege it is that our God wants to be known and that in wanting to be known he gives us a book that tells us exactly who he is and what he wants and what he desires from us and how he loves us in Christ and how he has paid the price for sin.

What a blessing it is to have that. Why would we neglect such a treasure? But it's not just unbridled individualism here. The second thing we see in chapter 18 is what we might call corporate pragmatism.

Corporate pragmatism. So the narrative it adds this corporate layer to the individualism in chapter 17. It turns our attention from one man Micah to an entire tribe Dan.

[ 26 : 50 ] So that the nature of spiritual decline on a corporate scale looks like this pragmatism which in this case what I mean by pragmatism is not simply what works pragmatism is not a problem if it's submitted to the scriptures.

So we're not talking about pragmatism in general what we're talking about is the idea of doing what is easy or convenient or apparently successful instead of doing what we know to be right and true. That's what's happening here on a corporate scale. Let's read the first ten verses of chapter 18. In those days there was no king in Israel and in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them.

So the people of Dan sent five able men from the whole number of their tribe from Zorah from Eshtiol to spy out the land and to explore it and they said to them go and explore the land and they came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah and lodged there and when they were by the house of Micah they recognized the voice of the young Levite and they turned aside and said to him who brought you here what are you doing in this place what's your business here and he said to them this is how Micah dealt with me he's hired me and I have become his priest and they said to him inquire of God please that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed and the priest said to them go in peace the journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord then the five men departed and came to Laish they saw the people who were there how they lived in security after the manner of the

Sidonians quiet unsuspecting lacking nothing that's in the earth possessing wealth and how they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone and when they came to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtael their brothers said to them what do you report and they said arise let us go up against them for we have seen the land and behold it's very good and will you do nothing do not be slow to go to enter in and possess the land as soon as you go you will come to an unsuspecting people the land is spacious for God has given it into your hands a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth it's crucial to acknowledge the opening statement here in verse 1 as the author is using it here to guide our interpretation in those days there was no king in Israel he's reminding us that Dan's actions in this story result from having no righteous king to prevent those actions okay just as

[ 29 : 47 ] Micah did what was right in his own eyes so did the tribe of Dan as they looked for a place to settle long term now the problem for Dan's settlement it's not that God didn't give them an allotment of land he did the problem is they didn't obey God by driving out the Canaanites there they did not trust him to deliver the Canaanites into their hands so that they could receive the land that he promised them that's what happened and we read that all the way back in Judges chapter 1 and verse 34 where it says the Ammonites Amorites excuse me press the people of Dan back into the hill country for they did not allow them to come down to the plain God had graciously provided for them they just did not receive the blessing they didn't trust him enough to do it they were afraid they didn't fight against them they tried to compromise with the people of the land and so they did not inherit the land that they wanted and later on when they got unsettled and discontent with it instead of resuming what God had commanded them to do they decided just to completely abandon what God had planned for them so that rather than doing what was right according to

God's word the tribe of Dan decided to find an easier path to settlement doing what's easy rather than what's right and they appoint five men they go and they spy out the northern portion of Canaan to see if there was some place that they could migrate and as these spies journeyed north they happened upon Micah's house and recognized the Levite whom Micah had hired and upon further inspection they discovered that this Levite was now happily serving as Micah's private priest so in chapter 17 it was the responsibility of the Levite to correct Micah's idolatry and call him to repentance in chapter 18 the situation changes the Levite is now sucked into the idolatry and it was the responsibility of the tribe of Dan to correct the Levite and to call him to repentance what they should have done was confront him with the scriptures they should have followed

God's processes and procedures in the law for how to deal with wayward Levites for people who committed this kind of spiritual adultery but instead they went along with it they went along with his false teaching they sought for him to pronounce a blessing from God on their efforts sinful efforts mind you do you see the delusion look again in verse four the Levite said to them this is how Micah dealt with me he's hired me I've become his priest that's when the tribe of Dan who shouldn't have been there to begin with but let's say that they were supposed to be there that's when they should have said wait a minute how could you do this this is wrong you must repent of this that's not what they do what did they do hey would you mind asking God for a blessing to ensure that our sin will be rewarded it's amazing delusion of course the

Levite was all too willing to pretend to speak to God on their behalf we aren't to take this verse number six as God actually speaking through the Levite why would he speak through someone who he had not actually appointed that doesn't make sense they're just caught up in their delusion verse 11 600 of the men of the tribe of Dan armed with weapons of war set out from Zorah and Eshtayol and went up and encamped at Kiriath Jerim in Judah on this account that place is called Mahanedan to this day behold it's west of Kiriath Jerim and they passed on from there to the hill

country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah so now it's not just the five spies they got 600 men they're gonna go make this thing happen they're going after Laish who this false pastor essentially has told them they need that God has blessed them to do then the five men who had gone to scout out the country of Laish said to their brothers do you know that in these houses there are an ephod household gods carved image metal image what do you think we should do about that and they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite at the home of Micah and asked him about his welfare now the 600 men of the Danites armed with their weapons of war stood by the entrance of the gate that's an intimidating picture there right you're this Levite the spies come to your door they're like hey we want to talk to you by the way check out the 600 men with a bunch of weapons right behind me make sure you listen to what I have to say it's pretty intimidating isn't it verse 17 and the five armed with weapons of war and when these went into Micah's house and took the carved image the ephod the household gods in the meadow image the priest said to them what are you doing and they said just be quiet put your hand on your mouth and come with us be to us a father and a priest is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man or to be a priest to an entire tribe and clan of

[ 35 : 31 ] Israel and the priest heart was glad and he took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people it only really takes a handful of people to lead an entire group astray doesn't it the spies convinced the people that it was right for them to take Laish which there's to do and they went with 600 soldiers to sack the city but first they stopped by Micah's house where the spies persuaded the others to steal the idols to recruit the priest and to adopt Micah's religion as their own they don't want Micah they just want his religion and again the Levite was motivated by money and prestige in chapter 17 we're told that he was content to live with Micah but in chapter 18 we're told that his heart was glad to go with the tribe of

Dan what is that all about well they said it wouldn't you enjoy being the chief priest of a tribe rather than just of a single man's house and the guy starts thinking about that and he starts thinking yeah that sounds real nice big promotion I think I'll go with you!

But we have to ask the question it's one thing for an individual to fall into this kind of spiritual decline we see that all the time don't we how does it happen with an entire tribe or for our purposes how does it happen to a church and I think the message here is pretty simple it starts by opting for what's easy and convenient rather than what is right it was easier to conquer the isolated defenseless city of Laish than it was to trust God to conquer the Ammonites Amorites on their behalf in the same way it's far easier for churches to compromise doctrine and faithful ministry practices than it is to obey

God and trust him to be fruitful through our obedience it's just easier to go along with what the culture wants us to do isn't it it's easier not to pick the fights with people it's easier not to have to take a strong convictional stand against sin or delusion in the church it's just easier not to and it often seems more fruitful not to at least at first it was easier to hire a Levite whom they could manipulate than to follow someone who would be committed to holding them accountable to God's word it's ostensibly more successful to establish leaders you can control who will lead on consensus based on what the people want generally than what God says to do just as Micah wanted things his own way so did Dan in the end the individual apostasy and church apostasy is really not very different it's just about doing things your way and ignoring

God's way that's how this happens all right and that was the long point two quick ones second thing what's the cost of losing our religion what does this cost us what's really the big deal about this things seem to be turning out okay for them it's not as good as you think verse 21 so they turned and departed putting the little ones and the livestock and the goods in front of them when they had gone a distance from the home of Micah the men who were in the houses near Micah's house were called out and they overtook the people of Dan and they shouted to the people of Dan who turned around and said to MicahNING what what what what what what what what what what what what the gods that I made and the priest and you ask me or excuse me and go away and what have I left how then do you ask me what's the matter with you and the people of Dan said to him don't let your voice be heard among us lest angry fellows fall upon you and you lose your life with the lives of your household they know the religion's false don't they is that not why they say is is this whole ordeal with the idol and this fake priest is this really enough to lose your life over Micah they know there's nothing of substance here and of course Micah realizes it at this point too the people of Dan went their way when Micah saw that they were too strong for him he turned

and went back to his home now wouldn't you think that if he was confident in his God and what he was doing to worship this God he could trust that God to deliver him from the tribe of Dan but he he knows there's nothing real here so he goes home but the people of Dan took what Micah had made and the priest who belonged to him and they came to Laish to people quiet and unsuspecting they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire and there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone it was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rahab then they rebuilt the city and lived in it and they named the city Dan after the name of Dan their ancestor who was born to Israel but the name of the city was Laisheth the first and the people of Dan set up the carved in bridge for them for themselves now get this and Jonathan the son of Gershom the son of Moses and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land wow up until this point we've seen Micah and the tribe of Dan lose their religion by turning away from the true worship of God to something different that they wanted more okay that's the context of the phrase at least up to this point in the story's conclusion here we see the loss that comes from such apostasy here they quote lose their religion not by forfeiture but first by its inerrant failure and then through God's divine judgment so let's just work through the characters here for Micah the episode ends in devastating loss

[ 43 : 03 ] notice what he says in the exchange with Dan's leaders in verse 24 you take my gods that I made you take the priests and you go away and what's that next phrase what have I left you took everything from me this man who was probably actually quite wealthy he lives on a compound with all these people who serve him and his purposes and his family he's got enough power and prestige that he can recruit the people that live around him to form a band of soldiers to actually go against the tribe of Dan or at least posture as if they would he's got wealth he's got power he's got prestige and yet when they take his religion from him when he realizes it's great failure he feels like he's lost everything he feels like he has nothing left why because his entire identity was wrapped up in his idolatry all of it this is what it looks like to be confronted with the fact that your personal brand of religion is fruitless that it's a lie to actually come to terms with reality it says there's nothing here and what did it do to Micah it crushed him I have nothing left nothing left which wasn't true but to him it felt like it was true this is common among modern deconstructionists when we enter into Christianity through some false form or dynamic that just isn't quite right it hurts people there are people who come into churches who lay out their statement of faith with tremendous accuracy but the way that they live out that faith is not consistent with what they say they believe instead of acknowledging Christ as Lord of his church they put a man on a pedestal and they just basically let him do whatever he wants to do they introduce legalism in ways that are incredibly harmful and then when that one man that these people come in and they trust and they love so much when he turns out to be a phony or he falls into great sin what happens to the people that have made their whole religion about this man and what he can do for them they're crushed why because it was never really about Christ it was about this man that they loved it was man worship we could go on and on down the line and see this perhaps some of you experienced this before where there was a point in your in your in your faith where it had all the right language but really in your heart you weren't really concerned with Christ as much as you were some other peripheral thing and when that thing proved to be a lie and you were confronted with the reality of it the temptation was to throw all of it away that's what this deconstructionism actually does it hurts people that's what's happening with Mikey what's the cost of this apostasy it's crushing he spent all that time curating his collection of gods seeking for God's blessing through his syncretism only to discover that none of it could actually help him he lost his new religion through its inherent failure to bring him life and peace and blessing let's move on to Dan though for Dan there's no immediate problem everything works out exactly as they wanted their collective apostasy it seems successful doesn't it they continue to exist presumably they flourish in this new home for actually hundreds of years but a later editor comes in and lets us know

that divine judgment eventually fell on Dan as it does every church that turns away from the truth look at verse 31 or verse 30 excuse me the people of Dan they set up this carved image they continued in their spiritual decline they have Jonathan and his sons were their priest and they had that until the day of the captivity you know sometimes success is God's judgment not God's blessing their hearts were hardened even further because God let them buy with what they did only to later pour out his judgment in the captivity of the Assyrians in 722 BC Micah loses his religion through its inherent failure Dan loses their religion through God's divine wrath let's move on to the

Levite this is interesting isn't it a twist in the story we don't really know the end for the Levite we know that his sons became perpetual priest for the tribe of Dan but there's a sober warning here isn't there in the end the Levite's identity is revealed as Jonathan the grandson of Moses it's another picture of just how bad things were in Israel at the time they had spiraled so far into idolatry that even Moses his own grandson had forsaken the Lord to do what was right in his own eyes that's how bad things were but the most significant loss of unbridled individualism and corporate pragmatism is the loss of the gospel that's the most significant loss here

Micah adopted this sacramentalism believing that religious objects and forms of worship could bring blessing look again at chapter 17 in verse 13 after he gets the priest and he's got his shrine set up then Micah said now that I have a priest the Lord will prosper me now that I've done all of these things now that I've done my best and tried my hardest now that I've got this worship set up in my house now God will bless me because I've done this God will now reward me with this it's an anti-gospel it's an anti-gospel blessing does not come and salvation does not come by what we do it comes on the basis of God's steadfast love and mercy and grace towards us you can't bribe God you can't earn anything from him he offers it to it on the basis of our faith and love for him and it's all based on his own kindness but this individualism it distorts that it loses the gospel

Dan on the other hand they adopt the gospel of apparent success believing that truth is determined by what works rather than what is right oh we see this in churches all the time don't we they compromise on doctrine they compromise on faithful practices of worship and then they succeed and what's their argument how could this be a problem look at all of these people that are now coming look at the buildings we're able to build look at the amount that's given in the offering look at our reach globally it's all about what works rather than what's right it loses the gospel it's a significant loss in the end everyone involved abandoned the thing that taught them the truth of eternal salvation god's word what they needed was the bible and they abandoned it and they faced the consequences thirdly and finally we're finished what's the solution to losing our religion what's the solution we've seen the nature of it we've seen its costs the solution is implicit in the verses that the author uses to state the cause first chapter 17 verse 6 in those days there was no king in israel everyone did what was right in his own eyes next chapter 18 verse 1 in those days there was no king in israel thirdly chapter 18 verse 31 they set up micah's carved image that he made and here's the contrast as long as the house of god was at shiloh that's a contrasting statement it's meant to to depict two ends there's a faithful end and there's an unfaithful end okay and through these three verses the author really never gives explicit judgment does he he never gives us a point in these two chapters where he says now here's the problem we were able to do to deduce it though he gives us these hints and these breadcrumbs in these three verses which really brings us back to the primary theme of the whole book which is that israel needed a king they needed a king but we need to understand that the right way it's not that they needed monarchy that's not what they needed and it would prove with every king they ever had that monarchy itself kingship itself could not save them it could not help them it was not the solution they needed the right kind of king they needed a king who would rule over them in perfect righteousness they needed a king who would lead based on god's word they needed a king who would deliver them from all of their enemies even themselves their spiritual enemies their spiritual enemies death and sin they needed a king who would ensure true and faithful worship amongst his people and that king is none other than jesus christ jesus who perfectly fulfilled god's law he did not break it ever why because he's god he's the son of god he died on the cross for our sins delivering us from our greatest enemy sin and death and hell he rose in order to assure us of eternal life and he sovereignly rules over his church and its worship the only solution for unbridled individualism and corporate pragmatism is to repent and to repent by believing the true gospel by submitting to the authority of the bible and by following christ plan for worship christ plan for spiritual authority the only solution for losing your religion ironically is to lose your religion that's what paul says in philippians chapter 3 whatever gain i had i counted as loss for the sake of christ indeed i count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing christ jesus my lord for his sake i've suffered the loss of all things and i count them as rubbish as trash in order that i might gain christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own making that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in christ the righteousness from god that depends on faith what's paul saying he's saying look if you want real religion if you want the true god if you want true salvation you got to lose the rest of it you got to lose the rest of it turn away from it count it as loss because that's exactly what it is count it as loss in order that you may be found in christ jesus said in matthew he gave two parables he said listen this

is what salvation is all about this is the nature of the true kingdom and the true king he said it's like a man who's walking through a field and he find a treasure of immeasurable value and what does the man do he takes everything else he owns and he gets rid of it in order that he can come and have that treasure and then jesus said and it's also like a merchant a pearl salesman a jeweler with great will who finds one pearl of such great price that he sells his whole business just so he can have the one pearl and jesus is saying i am that treasure jesus says i am that pearl forsake your personal versions of religion forsake your corporate pragmatism turn to me i'm better and paul agrees and so do the other apostles and so do christians for thousands of years why tinker with it tinkering with what god has said and what god has given us will do nothing but condemn us turn from those things abandon them and come to christ he is the king that we need he sets up the guardrails that prevents this kind of apostasy if we will just listen to him and he's so faithful isn't he he's the great shepherd and what does he do he blesses the church with these under shepherds and he says you lead the people in the way that i tell you to lead the people and he tells the church he says you make sure that you find elders and pastors who will not just do what you want them to do but who will teach you the truth of god's word who will do what christ has said to do who will preach the word who will follow faithfully the practices of true worship and of true ministry he's so gracious to do that isn't he that's how he rules over his church through his word and through his people and every once in a while a wolf in sheep's clothing pops its head up one like jonathan the son of moses the grandson of moses isn't it and what is our responsibility to do our responsibility is not to be like dan and just go along with it and hope that things turn out okay the responsibility of the collective church is to correct and discipline and even dismiss the man who has turned away from the truth you say jared you telling us that if you turn away from the truth you want us to fire you [ 58 : 04 ] if you don't you're going to be just like dan i don't have any intentions of doing that but that's your responsibility church it's not just about the men who lead we have a responsibility to you and you have a responsibility to us don't forsake that because the moment that you forsake that you'll start the steps of micah and dan which will end in tremendous loss and you'll lose the gospel ultimately and you'll be condemned and you'll realize eventually through devastating loss that it was all a lie don't do that stay faithful stay faithful to the word always do what's right not what's easy and the lord will bless us